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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

JANUARY 1, 1867.

THE MUSIC OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH.

By G. A. MACFARREN.

THE time in which we live seems to call on English musicians to give earnest, honest—nay, let me use the strongest term that can apply to the care of those whose days are spent in the practice of art—an artistic consideration to the subject of Church Music. I for one,—though reared and chiefly exercised in the secular school, and thus independent alike of the gratitude and grudges which I find are sometimes entailed on members of my profession by one or other ecclesiastical appointment,—feel the force of this call; and I trust therefore that it may not be deemed presumption for me to offer some considerations upon this important subject.

The time is past when the respectable father of a family would, at the head of his long-faced offspring, enter his high-walled pew,—a charitable retreat, covering a multitude of sinners, if not of sins,—then, as Leigh Hunt humorously defines the ceremony, reverently read the maker's name in his hat, deposit the glossy beaver beneath the luxurious seat, and lapse into a tranquil doze until the general stir after the benediction warned him to emerge from his sanctimonious seclusion. The time, too, is fast waning when all the congregation, other than the charity children and the clerk of the parish, forbore to utter the responses which constitute the people's part in the service, lest their neighbours might argue that their sins were worse than those of Mrs. Grundy's world, to need such articulate confession and deprecation. For the most part, folks now-a-days take their hearts with them to church, which they hold open to what good impressions the Service may be able to make upon them, and which they are ready to pour forth in expression of the feelings these impressions awaken. There is the strongest reason, therefore, in the general readiness to meet such efforts half way, for the present widely-spread endeavour to elevate the manner of celebration, according to the capacity of those who participate in it, and to the means at command in each particular establishment.

The powerful efficacy of music as the stimulant and as the voice of devotion, is now too widely acknowledged to need either assertion or proof. In the first aspect of its twofold purpose in the church—that which addresses itself to move the feelings of the hearers to full comprehension of the substance and significance of the Order for Prayer—music demands a divided consideration, as giving a general colour of solemnity to the entire ceremonial and all its circumstances, and as forming a special commentary on certain passages whose meaning it should illustrate, and whose sense it may enforce. In its second aspect—that which addresses itself from, rather than to the worshippers, uttering the feelings which have been stirred if not engendered—its consideration is entirely simple. In discussing these two aspects, it cannot be avoided to repeat much that has often been said, and said well; but I must yield to this necessity, in order to make clear anything

less hackneyed which I may be able to advance. There is also to observe the merit, or the want of it, in the working of the musical machinery in our greater and lesser churches; and in so doing, if I reiterate what may have been said by others, and what myself have elsewhere advanced, it will be because I believe the matter to be so important that it cannot be said too often until, if ever, the grievance against which it presses be repealed.

The opinion is at variance with the common practice of the day, but it is here none the less steadfastly asserted, that nobody is so fit to do a thing as he that has learned best how to do it, and that a lifetime spent in loving study of a subject is the most probable means to enrich a man with such knowledge as only can qualify him for a task that should exercise both his genius and his judgment. If there be any verity in this opinion as applied to other matters, the view cannot be untenable in respect of the direction of the music in ecclesiastical establishments. The strongest protest may therefore justly be made against the practice above alluded to, of appointing amateurs to offices of professional responsibility in its church application; since, with such most rare exceptions as serve to prove the rule, the office of controlling all the music and the musical arrangements in our churches devolves upon persons who have either an amateur acquaintance with, or a total ignorance of, the subject. The result of this much-to-be-regretted system has been the official neglect of cathedral music, the reduction of the numbers in the choirs, the ill-estimate and consequent degradation of the choristers, the often slovenly and always meagre performance of the service; and—worst of all—the frequent aggravation of the evil by ill-conceived designs to remedy it.

Prior to the Reformation, when all study was connected with religion, and learning was limited to the clergy, the knowledge of music was, like all other knowledge, confined to that body. In those days, the total amount of this knowledge was so very concise that an indifferently small amount of reading was enough to enable a student completely to master it. The one treatise of Boëtius,—Gregory's very circumscribed appropriation of a portion of the Greek system to Christian use,—the method of notation questionably ascribed to Guido of Arezzo,—and the very few crude, imperfect, artificial, arbitrary, exceptionless rules of counterpoint at that time developed,—then constituted the sum total of musical erudition. Conversancy with the prescribed *Cantus Firmus* of the Church, the ability to read and write this, and a knowledge of how to put, or perhaps more truly the knack of putting, accompanying harmonious parts to the same, were all that a musician could acquire, since all that was to be acquired, in the then chaotic state of the art. Superadded to his theological studies, the research needful for the full understanding of these few points was easily within the capability of any man of ordinary intelligence and moderate inclination to the subject. It was reasonable, therefore, in those days—firstly, because it could not be otherwise; and secondly, because the means were then all sufficient to the end, the qualifications compatible with the other exigencies of the clerical calling, and the men consequently competent to the duties—that the office of Precentor in our cathedrals, and other institutions of like magnitude, should be held by a priest, for a priest might then be able to discharge its functions; and that the vicars, or delegates, of

the larger establishments in the several parishes should receive their directions from the Precentor.

Coincident with the Reformation was the secularisation of learning; and music then, like all other subjects of mental study, became open to the laity. St. Peter's keys no longer locked the scholastic mysteries of the tuneful art within the stony confines of conventual walls, and the people—who had always practised, as they had ever loved, the concourse of sweet sounds—might then penetrate the principles, obscure and vague as they were, by which musical composition and musical performance were guided and restricted. From this time dates the modern free art of music; the trammels of the dogmatic Greco-ecclesiastical system then gave way to the first dawning light of nature; and the wonderful resources which are now at the artist's command, of harmonic combination, of melodic progression, of rhythmical division, and of continuous construction, then first began to be developed. Happy is now the musician who in a lifetime devoted to the sedulous study and practice of his art can master its manifold technical intricacies; far happier he who, by ceaselessly inhaling an atmosphere of music, can become imbued with the subtle spirit which is the first essential element of all musical production and all musical performance. The attainments of the modern musician should comprise all those that constituted complete musicianship in pre-Reformation times, together with those seemingly boundless resources which have been opened and developed during the four and a half centuries since the abolition of papal authority in the English Church. It is unreasonable, therefore, in these days—firstly, because it can, and should be otherwise; secondly, because the means are now totally insufficient to the end, incompatible with the other exigencies of the clerical calling, and the men consequently incompetent to the duties—it is unreasonable, it is unright, it is a degradation of art and a desecration of religion, that the office of Precentor should necessarily be held by a priest.

Let me here repeat that there have been rare exceptions in English Church appointments, of individual men who have passed through the test of ordination and have also been accomplished musicians. That this has been, is, and may in future be exceptionally the case, would well justify the leaving such an appointment free to a layman or an ecclesiast; and as an exclusive rule may occasionally result in the shutting out of a best qualified man, it is desirable that they who possess the extraordinary powers which enabled them to compass the qualifications for two widely distinct professions should, as well as singly professing musicians, be admissible to the duties of the Precentorship.

Sadly aware am I that this proposal is in utter opposition to existing statutes. I am not aware, however, that, though statutory opposition may present powerful difficulties to its adoption, if not to its consideration, these difficulties are by any means insuperable. The most stringent of statutes relax under the loosening influence of personal authority; the most obstinate of rules bend under the pressure of episcopal and capitulary power. Witness, that whereas the statute of each several ecclesiastical institution wherein a musical office is recognised rules that its representative shall be skilled in Plain Song, Prick Song, and descant—a man taught and practised in music—there have been, in open defiance

of this statute, countless appointments of persons entirely inadequate to its description of their fitness, and very many totally ignorant of the meaning of the terms in which it is defined. The dictum which could set aside this obviously needful prescription, in favour of the professional clergy at the expense of the best interests of the Church in so far as these have regard to music,—this same dictum could with equal right and with far greater reason evade any provision respecting theological graduation, for the sake of obtaining efficient administration of the technical duties of the musical office.

Were a proposal to be raised for the appointment of a musician, on the ground of his musicianship, to the office of Dean, the whole body of the English clergy—yes, and every rational member of the laity who gave thought to the matter—would unite in condemnation of its extravagant impropriety. The practice, however, is not one degree more proper of appointing a non-musician, on the ground of his fitness for non-musical duties, to the supreme direction of the entire musical department in the church.

One means naturally suggests itself whereby the difficulty of the position might in some sort be met, since it is fully compatible with both the clerical and artistic sides of the question. This would be, to legislate that no person should be eligible to the office of Precentor except he had passed through the test of musicianship administered in an University examination, and had gained the highest honours in the faculty of music which are conferred by our great gymnasia of the intellect. It is here presupposed that University degrees in music would not be, as for very long they were, tokens of the inefficiency of the men who bore them—signs that those musicians had, for the most part, little or nothing but their University degree to recommend them, whence the terms “twaddler” and “Dr. of music” came to be held as synonyms; the fact is obvious that no scholastic investigation can probe the genius of an artist, but his erudition may be gauged by a course of exercise in the art he professes; and we may presume that no one who is thoroughly versed in a subject can be destitute of sound taste and true discrimination in the particular bearings of that subject to which his attention is chiefly directed. Our body of ecclesiastics, with scarce exceptions, consists of University graduates; the dignitaries of the Church, I believe, without an exception, are distinguished by academical honours; it would therefore be no departure from, but an extension of, the scholastic course through which these functionaries at present pass, if, when they dedicated themselves to the musical offices of the Church, they should befit themselves for its due discharge by all necessary preparation, and that they should have such authoritative certificate of this preparation as should, in the eyes of the world and of those serving under them, justify their appointment. By this means, if there could not be a choice of the best musicians for Precentors, there would at least be a certainty that Precentors would understand something of, and have a due regard for, music.

This proposal, that fitness for the musical offices in the Church should be approved by scholastic examination and testified by university degrees, is in due accordance with the historic origin of the study of music in our seminaries of learning. When Alfred founded the musical professorship in his university of Oxford, it was with the express purpose that

music, as a most important element in the ecclesiastical ritual, should have the best opportunity of being skilfully cultivated and carefully studied. The music school of King Alfred was the first Royal Academy of Music in England, but it was a school of sacred music to qualify churchmen for the duties of church musicians, and thus to fit them for the fulfilment of the musical offices in the church, and not a school of secular music for the education of minstrels who, with all other exponents of the music of the people, had to learn the rules of their art beyond the precincts of the university. The practice of conferring musical degrees upon secular musicians—at least I have been unable to ascertain anything to the contrary—dates entirely from post-Reformation times, and it would be thus perfectly true to the conservative principle which the Church of England professes—the principle of conserving the purity of our ecclesiastical institutions in doctrine and in administration—if students for the church were required to make music a branch of their preparatory study, more or less important according to the character of the office to which they aspired, and if the university were to be the appointed arena wherein their proficiency in this, as in their other branches of study, should be tried.

Were the Precentor by compulsion a musician whether or not in holy orders, it is fair to suppose that he would be able to judge the merits and demerits of all who offered themselves to perform the musical portion of the service. It is fair to suppose that in this case, he would admit no person to the office of intoning priest who, firstly, possessed not a musical voice, and, secondly, had not so far mastered the art of singing as to be able to produce his voice with good effect, to sing in tune, to sustain the pitch throughout the entire portion of the service allotted to him, and to enunciate with clearness and emphasis. It would again be fair to suppose that, in this case, being a trained musician and so having the interest at heart of music and his fellow musicians, he would give such regard to the choice of choristers and to the care for their welfare as, in the first place, would ensure the engagement of the best men for the office, and, in the next place, would equally ensure the making that office so valuable in honour and emolument that to possess it might be a distinction of which men of real talent would be desirous, and duly to discharge it might bring a reputation of which such men might be proud. It would be, once more, fair to suppose that in this case so much to be wished, the Precentor would give such attention to the selecting and training of the singing boys as might result in making them at the same time both musicians and gentlemen: nay, there are countless reasons why a church choir should be the best possible school for the study of music, presenting as it does invaluable opportunities of constant practice, containing as it should the never-failing example within itself of accomplished artists, and affording as it must an experience of the styles and the works of different ages and different composers. Lastly, it is fair to suppose that in this desirable case of the Precentor being by necessity as well as by statute a musician, his sympathies with art would prompt him to appoint as his coadjutors, in the posts of choir-master and organist, whether combined or divided, such men as could by their genius and learning aid his deliberations, carry out the plans upon which they might mutually agree with him and take ad-

vantage of the many occasions that arise for the exercise and display of their musicianship to raise their own renown, and aggrandise the establishment wherein they served.

Let us look a step further and consider whether the influence, if even the functions, of a musician-Precentor, ordained or otherwise, need or would be limited by the walls of his cathedral. Before the dissolution of religious houses, the parochial clergy were for the most part under the control of the chief functionaries of the cathedral, if not of the collegiate church or the abbey or monastery of their district, being as they were, the vicars or representatives of these functionaries; and it is not the best consequence of King Henry's reorganization of ecclesiastical matters, that, in respect of music at least, our parish churches are not under any general superintendence which might curb the despotism of the incumbent minister, when this was exercised in opposition to the director of the music. It cannot be irrational to surmise that, if a musician-Precentor had some kind of supervision of all church music throughout his district, professional musicians would respect his authority, reverence his dictates, and vie with each other for distinction in carrying out his directions. If the established sovereignty, however, of each parish minister were so absolute that it would acknowledge no superiority—if the musician-Precentor of the metropolitan church could have no ruling power outside his own establishment—there might, and most probably would arise this good effect from the efficient artistic administration of his limited office, that its example would induce universally a proper regard for the importance of music, and a fitting acknowledgement of the competency of educated musicians to choose musical works, and to direct their performance. It could scarcely be possible that, with the pattern before him of a conscientious musicianly administration of all matters connected with this art in the parent church of the diocese, any clergyman could suffer under such stiff-necked blindness as would allow him to assert his own taste—were it good, indifferent or bad—in contradiction of the better judgement of a man whose natural gifts and artistic acquirements were, upon the subject in question, greater than his own.

(To be continued.)

PROFESSOR OAKELEY'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS AT EDINBURGH.

ON the 11th ult., Professor Oakeley delivered his first address before a large audience, and fully succeeded in proving that in electing him to the music chair of the University, those who placed confidence in him as an earnest and intellectual thinker on the art had not been deceived. We regret that our limited space will not allow us to do more than extract from his eloquent address. After mentioning that ill health had prevented him from entering upon his duties sooner, he said—

"Truly the range of music, as we now use the word, is almost infinite. I had well-nigh said it is infinite: certainly, it comes nearer to the ideas which we can form of the illimitable, than anything else in the world. It ranges from high and low; it lends itself to expression of the contending passions which moves the depths of man's heart, with an elasticity and plastic versatility to which there is surely no parallel. But it is not for such reasons only that it is both interesting and instructive to the lovers and students of music to explore its history in remote ages. Of music—more perhaps than anything else—we may say that it is unchanging in its nature. For the science is (paradoxical as it may at first sight appear) in some respects closely akin to that other great science which can alone be said to retain the stamp of a perpetual and indefeasible conclusiveness. Music is, if I may so speak, a kind of half-sister to mathematics—the most exact, the most ethereal, the most unvarying of all sciences. But I propose to withdraw you from the regions of exact science and art, and to consider music, in some of its acknowledged phenomena and effects, as a marvellous fact in creation, or, as I should rather say, a special gift from above, bear-